EVIDENCES OF EVOLUTIONARY MELIORISM IN THE LYRICAL POEMS OF THOMAS HARDY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a general view of the modern world one finds much tragedy. Many thinking minds of all nations have been focused upon evil and sorrow in life, probing for the cause of and a possible cure for man's misery. Since we are especially concerned with the age of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) it is apropos to be reminded that the most dominant factors moulding thought and life at that period were individualism, realism, utilitarianism, democracy, religion, and evolution.

These factors all had to do with man and his well-being; with his weaknesses and habits that interfere with his getting the best from life. Questions and principles involved in these different factors all had controversial aspects which enlisted the interest and efforts of the greatest minds of the day. Running through much of the effort of this age was an emphasis upon, and striving toward, common-sense intelligence and a steady and stable attitude which are the very foundations of sanity; in other words, upon a balanced sense of values founded upon reason rather than emotion. This emphasis upon balance naturally served to bring out more starkly the lack of balance at that time. As Hardy expresses it:

> Souls have grown seers and thought outbrings
> The mournful many-sidedness of things.[1]

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[1]Thomas Hardy, "The Sick Battle-God," Poems of the Past and the Present (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 88.

Since the voice of any age is heard through its literature, modern poetry, prose, drama, and fiction all teem with tales of life's tragic import and reverberate with ringing protests against existing conditions. Most writers of that period were alert to current problems and opinions. Novelists like George Eliot, and especially Meredith and Hardy, and poets such as Tennyson and Browning, embodied current issues in their prose and poetry; Ruskin in his essays showed how art and architecture, as did Arnold how literature, should embody and accentuate human values and furnish guidance and inspiration for better living; and Carlyle thundered his impassioned pleas for greater justice among men. Not only England was agitated over the problem of man's misery: Germany had her Hauptmann and Suderman, Sweden her Strindberg, Norway her Ibsen, Russia her Tolstoy, Turgeneff, and Gorky, all or much of whose writins were a protesting portrayal of social and other abuses by which men were victimized.

Scientists and philosophers, too, turned the search-light of their experimental methods on human life and nature. With the publication, in 1859, of Darwin's Origin of Species, its presentation of his theory of organic evolution and the theory of natural selection as its cause, man's life became still more profoundly disturbed. His creeds were challenged, his God threatened, and man, himself, was proclaimed a victim of either a malignant Fate, Time and Chance, or a Blind Force or Unconscious Will. A further contributing factor to the mental chaos of the last century was a "foible," or "impulse

for certitude," as Arthur McDowall calls it,

> which is visible to the present; this was the attitude of knowing things for certain....The tragedy of the Victorian was that their certitude had more and more to encounter shocks of the uncertain.[2]

One result of all of this confusion of thought was a wave of pessimism. Pessimism is "a word of modern coinage, denoting an attitude of hopelessness toward life...";[3] "the name given to the doctrine of Schopenhauer, Hartmann and other earlier and later philosophers that this world is the worst possible or that everything naturally tends to evil...."[4] "The average man is pessimist or optimist," we are further told, "not on theoretical grounds, but owing to the circumstances of his life, his material prosperity, his bodily health, his general temperament."[5] Lesser minds, unable to understand or penetrate or analyze conditions, were overwhelmed by the misery and gloom about them and became confirmed pessimists. Scholarly minds, though seeking anchorage, often found none and became agnostics or atheists. Only those fully and satisfactorily grounded in religious orthodoxy, who refused to surrender faith in their God, still held hope in the face of the encroachments of science and of conflict within the Church.

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[2]Arthur McDowall, Thomas Hardy, a Critical Study (London: Faber and Faber, 1931), p. 12.

[3]"Pessimism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed., vol. XVII.

[4]Sir James Augustus Henry Murray (ed.), "Pessimism," A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, vol. VII, 1928.

[5]"Pessimism," EB.

It is easy to understand why Hardy was, and still is, classed among the pessimists. Because of his temperament, no doubt, his metaphysic was a tragic one. He was deeply touched by the conflicts and tragedy in life, by pain and suffering in any form; hence his writings reflect a gloomy apprehension of life. In writing thus, however, he but follows his own dictum as found in the General Preface to the definitive edition of his works:

> Differing natures find their tongue in the presence of differing spectacles. Some natures become vocal at tragedy, some are made vocal by comedy, and it seems to me that to whichever of these aspects of life a writer's instinct for expression the more readily responds, to that he should be allowed to respond.

Elsewhere he says:

> As in looking at a carpet, by following one color a certain pattern is suggested, so by following another color, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone.[6]

This tragic pattern in Hardy's writings takes its shape from his innate sensitiveness--that sensitiveness born of an enveloping sympathy for all created things which caused him to wince sorrowfully at pain suffered by man and things animate; or even at anything which suggested to his sensitive imagination probable or potential pain in things inanimate. He sensed a kinship in all creation and seemed to find all creation sentient. "In spite of myself," he says, "I cannot help noticing countenances and tempers in objects of scenery; e.g.

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[6]Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy--hereafter abbreviated to Early Life (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), p. 198.

trees, hills, houses."[7] Elsewhere he says:

> I sometimes look upon all things in inanimate nature as pensive mutes.[8]

As "life bared its bones"[9] to Hardy, this sensitiveness in his nature veiled his thoughts in gloom and provided sufficient ground in his writings, one must concede, for the charge of pessimism. Many of his poems portray man in seemingly "helpless bondage thus to Time and Chance,"[10] or else as the apparent victim of a malignant Fate. I say "seemingly" and "apparent" because I hope to show by a closer study of his lyrical poems that Hardy's purpose was to show to man that nature is not innately vicious, but that the tragedies of life come from ignorant and unintelligent direction of its forces--the failure to combine reason with emotion; to show, too, that Hardy's seeming pessimism is grounded not in hopelessness, but in profound distress over the lag between man's potentiality and man's actuality--between his knowledge and his actions. As early as 1882 he wrote a note in his diary saying:

> Write a history of human automatism, or impulsion, viz., an account of human action in spite of human

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[7]Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928--hereafter abbreviated to Later Years (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930), p. 58.

[8]Early Life, p. 150.

[9]Thomas Hardy, "On an Invitation to the United States," Poems of the Past and the Present (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1901), p. 94.

[10]"The Bedridden Peasant," ibid., p. 113.

knowledge showing how very far conduct lags
behind knowledge.[11]

He also speaks of "the plethoric growth of knowledge simultaneously with the stunting of wisdom" as evidenced by the barbarizing of taste in the younger generation by madness of the late war, the unabashed cultivation of selfishness in all classes.[12] His protest, then, I believe, was not so much against a cruel and relentless Fate which thwarts man's plans as against unreasoning man who thwarts his innate powers and potentialities by allowing emotion instead of reason to master him. "Since I discovered several years ago," he says, "that I was living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently, I have troubled myself very little about theories....Where development according to perfect reason is limited to the narrow region of pure mathematics, I am content with tentativeness from day to day."[13] I shall attempt to show, also, that Hardy was not looking with his tragic eye <u>for</u> the gloom, but <u>through</u> the gloom in his earnest, sorrowful and persistent search for the gleam, as

...a soul that weighed,
Scarce consciously,
The eternal question of what Life was,
And why we were there, and by whose strange laws

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[11]<u>Early Life</u>, pp. 197-198.

[12]"Apology," <u>Late Lyrics and Earlier</u>, 1922, p. 530.

[13]<u>Early Life</u>, p. 201.

That which mattered most could not be.[14]

Surely his critics do not consistently follow his thinking through by taking his art as a whole--do not discriminate between pessimism, which carries the idea of hopelessness, and a gloomy or tragic metaphysic which colors his "questionings" or "blank misgivings," but which is avowedly seeking amendment by taking "a full look at the worst."[15] In reply to the charge of pessimism I would like to quote a part of a conversation between Hardy and William Archer:

> H. ...People call me a pessimist; and if it is pessimism to think with Sophocles, that not to have been born is best, then I do not reject the designation. I never could understand why the word pessimism should be such a red rag to many worthy people; and I believe, indeed, that a good deal of the robustious, swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere. I do not see we are likely to improve the world by asseverating, however loudly, that black is white....But my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs....On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist.[16] What are my books but one plea against 'man's inhumanity to man'--to woman and to the lower animals?...Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good.
>
> A. And you think that we are getting rid of the remediable ills?
>
> H. Slowly but surely--yes.[17]

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[14]"After the Visit," Satires of Circumstance, 1914, p. 291.

[15]"In Tenebris II," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 154.

[16]The underscoring is mine.

[17]The Book League Monthly (December, 1928) p. 177, reprinted from The Critic (July, 1901).

One could get no clearer expression of his belief that the world is growing better. Elsewhere he tells us:

> As to pessimism. My motto is, first correctly diagnose the complaint--in this case human ills--and ascertain the cause; then set about finding a remedy, if one exists. The motto or practice of the optimists is: Blind the eyes to the real malady and use empirical panaceas to suppress the symptoms.[18]

In September, 1918, Hardy received a letter asking him to assist in bringing home to the people certain facts relating to the future with a view to finding a remedy and stating that:

> It is agreed by all students of modern military methods that this war, horrible as it seems to us, is merciful in comparison with what future wars must be...The next war...will find the nations provided not with thousands but with hundreds of thousands submarines--all surpassing present types.

In his reply Hardy remarked:

> If it be true that the letter prophecies I do not think a world in which such fiendishness is possible to be worth saving. Better let western "civilization" perish and the black and yellow races have a chance. However, as a meliorist (not a pessimist as they say) I think better of the world.[19]

Thus in a number of statements we find ample justification for Hardy's claim that he was not a pessimist but an evolutionary meliorist. But the clearest and most definite and comprehensive expression is found in his "Apology" with which he prefaced his Late Lyrics and Earlier, a portion of which follows:

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[18] Later Years, p. 183.

[19] Ibid., pp. 189-190.

> For--while I am quite aware that a thinker is not expected, and, indeed, is scarcely allowed, now more than heretofore, to state all that crosses his mind concerning existence in this universe, in his attempts to explain or excuse the presence of evil and the incongruity of penalizing the irresponsible--it must be obvious to open intelligences that, without denying the beauty and faithful service of certain venerable cults, such disallowance of "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings" tends to a paralysed intellectual stalemate. Heine observed nearly a hundred years ago that the soul has her eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statutes, nor lullabied by the music of bells. And what is today, in allusions to the present author's pages, alleged to be "pessimism" is, in truth, only such "questionings" in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also.[20]
>
> If I may be forgiven for quoting my own old words, let me repeat what I printed in this relation more than twenty years ago, and wrote much earlier, in a poem entitled "In Tenebris":
>
> If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst:
>
> that is to say, by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism.[21] But it is called pessimism nevertheless; under which word, expressed with condemnatory emphasis, it is regarded by many as some pernicious new thing...and the subject is charitably left to decent silence, as if further comment were needless.
>
> Happily there are some who feel such Levitical passingby to be, alas, by no means a permanent dismissal of the matter; that comment on where the world stands is very much the reverse of needless in these disordered years of our prematurely afflicted century: that amendment and not madness lies that way.[22]

Meliorism is a term said to have been invented by George Eliot to express a theory mediating between optimism and pessimism, according to which the world on the whole makes

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[20]The underscoring is mine.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Thomas Hardy, "Apology," Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922, pp. 526-527.

progress in goodness.[23] The adjective "evolutionary" which Hardy affixed seems to signify acceptance of Darwin's theory of organic evolution. In her biography of him Mrs. Hardy says that "Hardy, as a young man, had been one of the earliest acclaimers of the Origin of Species."[24] I shall, therefore, attempt to examine through his lyrical poems, Hardy's claim as an evolutionary meliorist; to show that implicit in these poems is a progressive development in his "tentative" philosophy; that his earlier poems indicate a fatalistic belief in Time and Chance and an indifferent Nature as dominating man as its victim; that his later poems indicate a belief in a Prime Cause or Unconscious Will which is "foresightless," "sense sealed"; that in his last poems, there is implicit a hope and belief that this Unconscious Will will become Conscious, and that there will ultimately come an "alliance between religion, --which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come, unless also the whole world is to perish," whereby "pain to all upon (the earth) tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge";[25] that a "Great Adjustment is taking place" in which "Right shall

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[23]"Meliorism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed., vol. XV.

[24]Early Life, p. 198.

[25]"Apology," Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922, p. 531.

disestablish Wrong,"[26] and we shall see "Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair!"[27]

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[26]"There Seemed a Strangeness," Human Shows, 1925, p. 689.

[27]Thomas Hardy, "Afterscene," The Dynasts (The Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy, London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, vol. II, 1925).

CHAPTER II

EVIDENCES OF EVOLUTIONARY MELIORISM IN THE LYRICAL POEMS OF THOMAS HARDY

Wessex Poems and Other Verses, 1898, Hardy's first volume of verse, had been in the making since 1865 or earlier. He had always preferred poetry and felt his literary strength lay in verse. He was greatly disappointed that he could not at first get his poems published. This was due to their form as well as their content--both of which were considered unconventional at that time. For monetary reasons he was forced to forego poetry and write novels. As soon, however, as he amassed a comfortable living from his novels, he returned to writing verse because he felt impelled to convey in poetry his message to the world. He interprets this experience for us in the following words:

> A sense of the truth of poetry, of its supreme place in literature, had awakened itself in me. At the risk of ruining all my worldly prospects I dabbled in it...was forced out of it....It came back upon me.... All was the nature of being led by a mood, without foresight, or regard to whither it led.[1]

To understand the basis of Hardy's thinking one must understand his conception of poetry and its mission. "The poet takes note of nothing he cannot feel emotively," he tells us.[2] Others of his expressions about poetry are interesting and enlightening:

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[1] Later Years, p. 185.

[2] Ibid., p. 133.

> Poetry is emotion put into measure. The emotion must come by nature but the measure can be acquired by art.[3]
>
> To find beauty in ugliness is the province of the poet.[4]
>
> By the will of God some men are born poetical.... My opinion is that a poet should express the emotion of all the ages and the thought of his own.[5]
>
> I hold that the mission of poetry is to record impressions, not convictions.[6]
>
> Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion--hard as a rock--which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel...will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer or foam and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist, which in their crass illiteracy they seem to think is the same thing.[7]
>
> ...Poetry and religion touch each other, or rather modulate into each other; are, indeed, often but different names for the same thing...[8]

Because Hardy felt that his strength lay in poetry--that he could not escape from its definite urge as a medium of expression--and because he tells us he found greater

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[3]Early Life, p. 279.

[4]Ibid., p. 78.

[5]Later Years, p. 188.

[6]Ibid., p. 178.

[7]Ibid., p. 58.

[8]"Apology," Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922, p. 530.

freedom of expression in poetry, it seems only logical that in his verse rather than in his prose one should look for a franker, freer treatment of his "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings" as to the "inexplicable mystery of life" which seems his chief concern, as well as the clearest, truest, most concrete, yet comprehensive, expression of the outpourings of this great "heart insurgent."

Although in both poetry and prose Hardy insisted first and last that he expressed merely a "tentative" philosophy,[9] yet throughout his poems one finds expressions of ideas which reveal quite definitely the trend of his thinking. He relentlessly hurls at the powers that be such "obstinate questionings" as:

> Part is mine of the general Will,
> Cannot my share in the sum of sources
> Bend a digit the poise of forces,
> And a fair desire fulfil?[10]

> ...How arrives it joy lies slain,
> And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?[11]

> --"And how explains thy Ancient Mind her crimes upon her creatures,

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[9]See: Later Years, pp. 175, 219.
Thomas Hardy, "Author's Introduction," Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928), p. 13.

[10]"He Wonders about Himself" (November, 1893), Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 479.

[11]"Hap," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 7.

These fallings from her fair beginnings, woundings
where she loves,
Into her would-be perfect motions, modes, effects, and
features
Admitting cramps, black humours, wan decay, and baleful
blights,
Distress into delights?"[12]

"...What reasons made you call
From formless void this earth we tread....

"Yea, Sire; why shaped you us, 'who in
This tabernacle groan'--...[13]

..."But how do I come here,
Who never wished to come....[14]

But, Sage--this Earth--why not a place
Where no reprisals reign,
Where never a spell of pleasantness
Makes reasonable a pain?[15]

"Are You groping Your way?
Do You do it unknowing?--
Or mark Your wind blowing?
Night tell You from day,
O Mover? Come, say!"

"I mean, querying so,
Do You do it aware,

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[12]"The Lacking Sense," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 106.

[13]"New Year's Eve," Time's Laughingstocks, 1909, p. 260.

[14]"The Masked Face," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 490.

[15]"The Child and the Sage," Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922, p. 578.

Or by rote, like a player,
Or in ignorance, nor care
Whether doing or no?"[16]

Would that your Causer,...
...might deign to tell
Why, since It made you
Sound in the germ,
It sent a worm
To madden Its handiwork...[17]

In these "questionings" and in the answers to some of them which Hardy offers, one discovers that the framework of his philosophy hinges upon the question "Whence and why comes pain?"; that revolving in his brain are many "impressions of the age," out of which he hopes to evolve an answer to this question which will prove satisfactory to both his intellectual and emotional natures. In the "Subalterns"[18] we find him voicing the idea of Fatalism:

"Poor wanderer," said the leaden sky,
"I fain would lighten thee,
But there are laws in force on high
Which say it must not be."

--"I would not freeze thee, shorn one," cried
The North, "knew I but how
To warm my breath, to slack my stride;
But I am ruled as thou."

In the same poem Sickness and Death say they would function differently but are themselves slaves to a higher power. In

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[16]"Xenophanes, The Monist of Colophon," Human Shows, 1925, p. 692.

[17]"On the Portrait of a Woman about to be Hanged," ibid., 1925, p. 747.

[18]"The Subalterns," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 110.

"The Convergence of the Twain (Lines on the loss of the Titanic),"[19] we have an expression of determinism. We are told that the Immanent Will planned the Titanic and "A Shape of Ice," and when the Spinner of the Years said, "Now!" each one heard, consummation came and jarred two hemispheres. We find throughout his poems other references to fatalism and determinism.

Another idea discoverable in his poems is that man is a victim of Time and Chance. In "She, to Him,"[20] he pessimistically remarks that "That Sportsman Time but rears his brood to kill," and in his poem titled, "Ditty,"[21] he says:

. . . . . .

And Devotion droops her glance
To recall
What bond-servants of Chance
We are all....

Again in "Hap" he tells us:

--Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.[22]

The most commonly quoted expression of this idea is found in "The Bedridden Peasant":[23]

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[19]"The Convergence of the Twain," Satires of Circumstance, 1914, p. 288.

[20]"She to Him," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 11.

[21]"Ditty," ibid., p. 13.

[22]"Hap," ibid., p. 7.

[23]"The Bedridden Peasant," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 113.

But Thou, Lord, giv'st us men our day
In helpless bondage thus
To Time and Chance, and seem'st straightway
To think no more of us!

In all of his writings Hardy dwells consistently upon the significance of Chance. It is not always as negative an influence as he whimsically describes in a quotation from his notes:

> ...Drove home from dining with McIlvaine...behind a horse who had no interest in me, was going a way he had no interest in going, and was whipped on by a man who had no interest in me, or the horse or the way. Amid this string of compulsions, reached home.[24]

Hardy recognized that life is, after all, one continuous string of compulsions--junctures of time, place, persons and events--which man cannot avoid; some of which are "just neutral-tinted haps and such,"[25] while others are positive, stark and even tragic in their impact. He recognized, too, that operative at these junctures are certain natural or "junctive laws"[26] which help determine what effect, fair or foul, these compulsions exert upon man. What man is and does depends upon the reaction of what is within him to these impacts from without. He is endowed with will power, intelligence and reason, and has that within him which determines whether life's compulsions result destructively or construc-

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[24]Later Years, p. 13.

[25]"He Never Expected Much," Winter Words, 1928, p. 16.

[26]"Revulsion," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 11.

tively. It is to emphasize this fact, I believe, that Hardy makes such significant and consistent use of the element of Chance. His emphasis upon Chance, then, should not, I believe, be interpreted as pessimism; but quite the opposite: as a powerful exploitation, effective and constructive, of one of the most significant facts of life. This emphasis exemplifies his belief that "if way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst."[27]

Hardy, first and last, rejected the idea of a malignant Creator as a Prime Cause. He declares in his poem "Hap" that such a belief would in a way bring to him comforting relief:

> If but some vengeful god would call to me
> From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
> Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
> That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!'
>
> Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
> Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
> Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
> Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.[28]

"But not so," he says, and places the blame upon Crass Casualty or Time and Chance. In "The Bedridden Peasant" he even invests the "unknowing God" with love and pity:

> . . . . . .
> ...For Thou art mild of heart,
>
> And wouldst not shape and shut us in
> Where voice can not be heard:
> Plainly Thou meant'st that we should win
> Thy succour by a word.[29]

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[27]"In Tenebris," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 154.

[28]"Hap," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 7.

[29]"The Bedridden Peasant," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 113.

Not only does the poet reject the idea of a malignant Creator but in "The Lacking Sense" he asks Time about the "moody" look of the Mother amid her labours, "as of one who all unwittingly has wounded where she loves." Time answers:

> --"Her look is but her story:...
> In her wonderworks yea surely has she wounded where she loves.
> The sense of ills misdealt for blisses blanks the mien most queenly,
> Self-smitings kill self-joys; and everywhere beneath the sun
> Such deeds her hands have done."

In answer to the question, in the same poem, "And how explains thy Ancient Mind her crimes upon her creatures?" the poet pleads excuse of probable limited power or knowledge--"vainly veiled deficience"; that "sightless are those orbs of hers--which bar to her omniscience"; and further bespeaks pity and assistance for the Mother who "has wounded where she loves":

> "Deal, then, her groping skill no scorn, no note of malediction;
> Not long on thee will press the hand that hurts the lives it loves;
> And while she plods dead-reckoning on, in darkness of affliction,
> Assist her where thy creaturely dependence can or may,
> For thou art of her clay."[30]

This idea of the Creator being limited in knowledge or power is one of three alternatives that Hardy admits in one of his notes:

> The Prime Force or Forces must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel--which is obvious enough and has been for centuries.[31]

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[30]"The Lacking Sense," ibid., p. 106.

[31]Later Years, p. 97.

The idea of blindness is also mentioned in one of his notes:

> One of two things; that she is blind and not a judge of her actions or that she is an automaton and unable to control them.[32]

Nature's indifference is another "impression of the age" which Hardy uses as a subtitle to his poem, "At a Bridal." The poet and his love dream of offspring compounded of the twain, but both wed "as slave to Mode's decree" (for expedience rather than for love) and

> ...each thus found apart, of false desire,
> A stolid line, whom no high aims will fire
> As had fired ours could ever have mingled we;
>
> And, grieved that lives so matched should miscompose,
> Each mourn the double waste; and question dare
> To the Great Dame whence incarnation flows,
> Why those high-purposed children never were:
> What will she answer? That she does not care
> If the race all such sovereign types unknows.[33]

In another poem he again upbraids an indifferent Nature:

> The Dame has no regard, alas, my maiden,
> For love and loss like mine--
> No sympathy with mindsight memory-laden;
> Only with fickle eyne.
> To her mechanic artistry
> My dreams are all unknown....[34]

The one poem among his earlier verses toward which most criticism is directed and which is held up as one of the outstanding examples of Hardy's pessimism is "Nature's Questioning." The first three stanzas embody Hardy's idea that all creation is sentient, or what he poetically describes

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[32] Ibid.

[33] "At a Bridal," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 8.

[34] "To a Motherless Child," ibid., p. 58.

as "pensive mutes":

> When I look forth at dawning, pool,
> Field, flock, and lonely tree,
> All seem to gaze at me
> Like chastened children sitting silent in a school;
>
> Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn,
> As though the master's ways
> Through the long teaching days
> Had cowed them till their early zest was overborne.
>
> Upon them stirs in lippings mere
> (As if once clear in call,
> But now scarce breathed at all)--
> "We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!

The following three verses are those which bear the brunt of criticism because too often they are mutilated by being quoted in excerpts:

> "Has some Vast Imbecility,
> Mighty to build and blend,
> But impotent to tend,
> Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?
>
> "Or come we of an Automaton
> Unconscious of our pains? . . .
> Or are we live remains
> Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?
>
> "Or is it that some high Plan betides,
> As yet not understood,
> Of Evil stormed by Good,
> We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?"[35]

The four questions in these verses are all "impressions of the age" definitely interesting to poets, theologians, philosophers and scientists. Is man a helpless victim of a Malignant Fate or of Time and Chance? Do we come of an Automaton, who is unconscious of our pains? Are we what remains of a Personal-God whose Deity is gradually becoming

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[35]"Nature's Questioning," ibid., p. 58.

less and less vital? Or is some great cosmic Plan in the making, not yet understood, in which Good will overcome Evil, with man the medium over which achievement will stride? Instead of finding implicit in these verses a hopeless pessimism, the very opposite, it seems to me, is true. Their very sequence is progressively optimistic--happily climactic. Reverse the order,

> Is it that some high Plan betides
> As yet not understood,
> Of Evil stormed by Good,
> We the Forlorn Hope over which achievement strides?
>
> Or are we the live remains
> Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eyes now gone?
> Or come we of an Automaton,
> Unconscious of our pains?...
>
> Or has some Vast Imbecility,
> Mighty to build and blend,
> But impotent to tend,
> Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

and we have a progressively pessimistic outburst. But Hardy phrased it otherwise; so why should any gainsay his meaning? Hardy only says:

> ...No answerer I...
> Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
> And Earth's old glooms and pains
> Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbors nigh.

indicating that the answer was as yet "too sunk in to say".[36]

Too often critics of Hardy assume that man and his Creator are two separate entities antagonistic one to the other. This idea is easily adduced from his earlier writings

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[36]"The Master and the Leaves," Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922, p. 620.

wherein he speaks of the continual struggle of man against Time or Chance, or an indifferent Nature. In his later Poetry, however, we find evidence, in content and terminology, that he had familiarized himself with and had accepted current ideas in philosophy in which man is considered a part of the Impersonal Force or Energy which is the source of his being. This force was called by different names, such as "Will" by Schopenhauer; "The Unconscious" by Von Hartmann; "The Perfect Self-Existent" by Spinoza, etc. Hardy seems to have found no name which conveyed in its entirety his conception of this Force. He is quoted as saying in a letter to Mr. Edward Wright:

> I quite agree with you in holding that the word Will does not perfectly fit the idea to be conveyed--a vague thrusting or urging internal force in no predetermined direction. But it has become accepted in philosophy, for want of a better, and is hardly likely to be supplanted by another, unless a highly appropriate one could be found, which I doubt. The word that you suggest--Impulse--seems to me to imply a driving power behind it; also a spasmodic movement unlike that of, say, the tendency of an ape to become man and other such processes.[37]

In his poems we find numerous names that he used in phrasing the mood patent at the moment, for instance: The Absolute, in "The Absolute Explains"; The Eternal Mind, in "By the Earth's Corpse"; the Inscrutable, in "The Blow"; the Causer, in "On the Portrait of a Woman About to be Hanged"; Crass Casualty, and Purblind Doomster, in "Hap"; the Immanent Doer

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[37]Later Years, p. 124.

That doth not know, in "The Blow"; the All-One, in "Reverie"; the Willer, in "To An Unknown God"; God, in "The Woman I Met"; Mother, in "The Sleep-Worker"; The Lord Most High, in "God-Forgotten"; and many, many more. Most frequently, however, Hardy used the "Immanent Will" and "It". He explains his use of the neuter pronoun in the following note:

> And the abandonment of the masculine pronoun in allusions to the First or Fundamental Energy seemed a necessary and logical consequence of the long abandonment by thinkers of the anthropomorphic conception of the same.[38]

To those whose minds are of the orthodox Christian mold and whose faith rests upon belief in a personal God who is a loving Father, this degendering and depersonalization of the Deity comes with somewhat of a shock. Those who subscribe to a more scientific attitude, however, feel a curious interest concerning what is Hardy's conception of Deity--just what this "It" stands for. Through all time, men have differed in their idea of the Deity because man's conception of the Supreme Being is usually expressed in terms of what lies beyond man's upward and utmost reach. The human being clothes his God, if he has one, with those attributes which he most esteems and strives for, but which he feels impossible of perfect attainment; hence man's God is but an exaggeration of man's highest ideal of himself. Because, for instance, the father as head of the Jewish family typified all that the Jew

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[38]Thomas Hardy, "Preface," The Dynasts, Part I, 1904, p. ix.

held noblest and best in man he was held in almost sacred esteem; and the Jew's God was evolved in terms of an omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent Father. The Christians inherited this Jewish conception of God, the Father, although the Jews' and the Christians' ideal differ in that the Jews believe in a wrathful, avenging Father who demanded "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," while the Christians believe in a Father who tempers justice with mercy.

This idea of man having created his own God which science destroyed is treated by Hardy in several of his poems. In "A Plaint to Man," the poet has God say to man:

When you slowly emerged from the den of Time,
And gained percipience as you grew,
And fleshed you fair out of shapeless slime,

Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you
The unhappy need of creating me--
A form like your own--for praying to?

My virtue, power, utility,
Within my maker must all abide,
Since none in myself can ever be,

One thin as a phasm on a lantern-slide
Shown forth in the dark upon some dim sheet,
And by none but its showman vivified.

"Such a forced device," you may say, "is meet
For easing a loaded heart at whiles:
Man needs to conceive of a mercy-seat

Somewhere above the gloomy aisles
Of this wailful world, or he could not bear
The irk no local hope beguiles."

--But since I was framed in your first despair
The doing without me has had no play
In the minds of men when shadows scare;

And now that I dwindle day by day
Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
In a light that will not let me stay,

And to-morrow the whole of me disappears,...[39]

Again in "God's Funeral" the poet followed moving columns in a slowly-stepping train which bore a strange and mystic form, and

They, growing in bulk and numbers as they went,
Struck out sick thoughts that could be overheard:--

"O man-projected Figure, of late
Imaged as we, thy knell who shall survive?
Whence came it we were tempted to create
One whom we can no longer keep alive?

"Framing him jealous, fierce, at first,
We gave him justice as the ages rolled,
Will to bless those by circumstance accurst,
And longsuffering, and mercies manifold.

"And, tricked by our own early dream
And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,
Our making soon our maker did we deem,
And what we had imagined we believed.

"Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,
Uncompromising rude reality
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.[40]

Opposing the orthodox idea of a personal God is the scientist's idea of a great impersonal Force. The scientist's conception of Deity is the Prime Cause of Creation, whatever that may be, and hinges upon his grasp of the numerous forces which he finds at work in the universe, and upon his ability to discover, relate and integrate all these forces, and trace them, if possible, to their source. Thus the scientist's Deity resolves itself into the great creative or energizing

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[39]"A Plaint to Man," Satires of Circumstances, 1914, p. 306.

[40]"God's Funeral," ibid., p. 307.

Force, unconscious, eternal, deterministic, which moves by immutable laws the mighty cosmos in some mighty plan or process. When scientists and philosophers substituted for a personal God this impersonal Force, the systematic study of the fundamental problems relating to the ultimate nature of reality, called Ontology, developed controversial aspects. Is there anything permanent at the basis of the changing phenomena of Nature? Is there only one ultimate cause or reality, or more than one? Is ultimate reality of one kind or more than one? How many fundamental or irreducible attributes which pertain to the real or reals? These are the main questions involved in the history of Western philosophy.[41] Since, however, this is no philosophical treatise, all we need concern ourselves with here is the fact that in Hardy's day the most widely accepted Ontological theory was monistic, that is, the theory that there is but one ultimate reality; that all creation stems from one Source, whatever that may be.

In the philosophical terminology of his day, Hardy accepts this Source as the Unconscious Will. The idea of the unconsciousness of the Will is prevalent in many of his later poems. In "The Bullfinches," the poet in imagination hears the birds speak of Nature's way:

> All we creatures, nigh and far
> (Said they there), the Mother's are;
> Yet she never shows endeavour
> To protect from warrings wild
> Bird or beast she calls her child.

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[41]Abraham Wolf, "Metaphysics," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1929, XV, pp. 332-333.

Busy in her handsome house
Known as Space, she falls a-drowse;
Yet, in seeming, works on dreaming,
While beneath her groping hands
Fiends make havoc in her bands.

How her hussif'ry succeeds
She unknows or she unheeds....[42]

He makes the bedridden peasant say:

Might but Thy sense flash down the skies
Like man's from clime to clime,
Thou wouldst not let me agonize
Through my remaining time;

. . . . . .

Then, since Thou mak'st not these things be,
But these things dost not know,
I'll praise Thee as were shown to me
The mercies Thou wouldst show![43]

In another poem, "New Year's Eve," in answer to the question, "Why shaped you us?" God replies:

..."My labours--logicless--
You may explain; not I:
Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
That I evolved a Consciousness
To ask for reasons why....

He sank to raptness as of yore,
And opening New Year's Day
Wove it by rote as theretofore,
And went on working evermore
In his unweeting way.[44]

In his much quoted poem, "The Blow,"[45] if I may repeat, he is thankful that

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[42]"The Bullfinches," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 111.

[43]"The Bedridden Peasant," ibid., p. 113.

[44]"New Year's Eve," Time's Laughingstocks, 1909, p. 260.

[45]"The Blow," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 449.

Time's finger should have stretched to show
No aimful author's was the blow
That swept us prone,
But the Immanent Doer's That doth not know.

In many another poem, such as "Doom and She,"[46] "Before Life and After,"[47] "God's Education,"[48] and "The Master and the Leaves,"[49] we find expression of this same idea; but it is in "The Sleep-Worker" that we find the epitome of the problem of the Will's unconsciousness as it revolves in Hardy's mind. He relentlessly plies questions to the Mother, searching in implications, but optimistic in sequence, upon the answers to which hinge not only his life effort and philosophy, but his hope for the salvation of the universe:

When wilt thou wake, O Mother, wake and see--
As one who, held in trance, has laboured long
By vacant rote and prepossession strong--
The coils that thou hast wrought unwittingly;

Wherein have place, unrealized by thee,
Fair growths, foul cankers, right enmeshed with wrong,
Strange orchestras of victim-shriek and song,
And curious blends of ache and ecstasy?--

Should that morn come, and show thy opened eyes
All that Life's palpitating tissues feel,
How wilt thou bear thyself in thy surprise?--

Wilt thou destroy, in one wild shock of shame,
Thy whole high heaving firmamental frame,

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[46]"Doom and She," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 108.

[47]"Before Life and After," Times Laughingstocks, 1909, p. 260.

[48]"God's Education," ibid., p. 261.

[49]"The Master and the Leaves," Late Lyrics and Earlier, p. 621.

Or patiently adjust, amend, and heal?[50]

Another "impression" which we discover in Hardy's poems is the idea that the creature, Man, has developed beyond the plan or expectation of his Creator. "We," he says, meaning human beings, "have reached a degree of intelligence which Nature never contemplated when framing her laws, and for which she consequently has provided no adequate satisfactions." "This," Mrs. Hardy tells us parenthetically, "which he had adumbrated before, was clearly the germ of the poem entitled "The Mother Mourns."[51] In this poem we read such lines as the following:

--"I had not proposed me a Creature
(She soughed) so excelling
All else of my kingdom in compass
And brightness of brain

"As to read my defects with a god-glance,
Uncover each vestige
Of old inadvertence, annunciate
Each flaw and each stain!

"My purpose went not to develop
Such insight in Earthland;
Such potent appraisements affront me,
And sadden my reign!

. . . . . .

"Man's mountings of mindsight I checked not,
Till range of his vision
Now tops my intent, and finds blemish
Throughout my domain.

. . . . . .

"'Give me,' he has said, 'but the matter
And means the gods lot her,
My brain could evolve a creation

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[50]"The Sleep-Worker," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 110.

[51]Early Life, 1930, p. 213.

More seemly, more sane.'[52]

In his poem "New Year's Eve" he has God say:

"Strange that ephemeral creatures who
By my own ordering are,
Should see the shortness of my view,
Use ethic tests I never knew,
Or made provision for!"[53]

That Hardy worked out an intellectual resolution of the seeming paradox that man, a conscious creature, emanated from an Unconscious Will, we find suggested in a comment he makes about Alfred Noyes, who objected to his philosophy:

> Noyes can't conceive a Cause of Things...less in any respect than the thing caused. This apparent impossibility...is very likely owing to his running his head against a Single Cause, and perceiving no possible other. But if he would discern that what we call the First Cause should be called First Causes his difficulty would be lessened. Assume a thousand unconscious causes--lumped together in poetry as Cause, or God--and bear in mind that a coloured liquid can be produced by the mixture of colourless ones, a noise by the juxtaposition of silences, etc., etc., etc., and you see that the assumption that intelligent beings arise from the combined action of unintelligent forces is sufficiently probable for imaginative writing and I have never attempted scientific.[54]

One can hardly miss the significance which attaches to this statement in revealing the trend in Hardy's thinking toward finding explanation of all of life's processes in terms of a physical, spiritual, psychical, or cosmic activity.

Significant, too, in Hardy's thinking is what one

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[52]"The Mother Mourns," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 101.

[53]"New Year's Eve," ibid., p. 260.

[54]Later Years, p. 219.

refers to as a "nostalgia for a lost or impossible faith."[55] Speaking of Hardy's association with the church Mrs. Hardy tells us:

> Hardy said that although invidious critics had cast slurs upon him as Nonconformist, Agnostic, Atheist, Infidel, Immoralist, Heretic, and Pessimist...they have never thought of calling him what they might have called him more plausibly--Churchy; not in the intellectual sense but in so far as instincts and emotions ruled. As a child, to be a parson had been his dream. He had read church lessons and had at one time as a young man begun reading for Cambridge with a view to taking orders.[56]

It is generally known that his refusal to take orders was because of his unorthodox views. Running through his poetry, however, one finds expressions of a poignant regret at loss of faith, and pensive longings for the values and comfort which the Christian derived from his belief in a loving, protecting Father, as well as for the Christian's hope of eternal happiness in life after death. In "The Bedridden Peasant" he reverts to the biblical title, "Lord," and in imagination invests the Unconscious Will with the love and pity of the Christian's personal God:

> Might but Thy sense flash down the skies
> Like man's from clime to clime,
> Thou wouldst not let me agonize
> Through my remaining time;
>
> But, seeing how much Thy creatures bear--
> Lame, starved, or maimed, or blind--
> Wouldst heal the ills with quickest care
> Of me and all my kind.[57]

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[55]Arthur McDowall, Thomas Hardy, a Critical Study, p. 29.

[56]Later Years, p. 176.

[57]"The Bedridden Peasant," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 113.

In "Let Me Enjoy" he sings in a "minor key":

> And some day hence, towards Paradise
> And all its blest--if such should be--
> I will lift glad, afar-off eyes,
> Though it contain no place for me.[58]

In "God's Funeral" he seems to feel with the mourners:

> "How sweet it was in years far hied
> To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,
> To lie down liegely at the eventide
> And feel a blest assurance he was there!
>
> "And who or what shall fill his place?
> Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
> For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
> Towards the goal of their enterprise?" . . .

And when the mourners chimed that this requiem was a mockery, that to them God still lived, he sympathetically remarked:

> I could not buoy their faith: and yet
> Many I had known: with all I sympathized;
> And though struck speechless, I did not forget
> That what was mourned for, I, too, long had prized.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
> Mechanically I followed with the rest.[59]

In "The Voice of Things" we have what might be called his spiritual biography. In the first verse he clothes his younger years and experiences in terms of the sea, wherein:

> The waves huzza'd like a multitude below
> In the sway of an all-including joy
> Without cloy.

In the second verse he describes in the same imagery that period in his life of doubt and cynicism--

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[58]"Let Me Enjoy," Time's Laughingstocks, 1909, p. 222.

[59]"God's Funeral," Satires of Circumstance, 1914, p. 307.

Blankly I walked there a double decade after,
When thwarts had flung their toils in front of me,
And I heard the waters wagging in a long ironic laughter
At the lot of men, and all the vapoury
Things that be.

In the third verse his thinking has changed and he wistfully concludes:

Wheeling change has set me again standing where
Once I heard the waves huzza at Lammas-tide;
But they supplicate now--like a congregation there
Who murmur the Confession--I outside,
Prayer denied.[60]

"The Impercipient" voices most powerfully this "nostalgia":

That with this bright believing band
I have no claim to be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a strange destiny.

Why thus my soul should be consigned
To infelicity,
Why always I must feel as blind
To sights my brethren see,
Why joys they've found I cannot find,
Abides a mystery.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know; since it be
That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's-Well to me,
My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity!

I am like a gazer who should mark
An inland company
Standing upfingered, with, "Hark! hark!
The glorious distant sea!"
And feel, "Alas, 'tis but yon dark
And wind-swept pine to me!"

Yet I would bear my shortcomings
With meet tranquillity,
But for the charge that blessed things

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[60]"The Voice of Things," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 401.

I'd liefer not have be.
O, doth a bird deprived of wings
Go earth-bound wilfully![61]

In "An Afternoon Service at Mellstock," also biographical, he says of the psalm-singing: "So mindless were those outpourings," yet adds significantly:

Though I am not aware
That I have gained by subtle thought on things
Since we stood psalming there.[62]

In his being haunted by a psalm-tune;[63] in his craving for evidence of personal immortality:--

To glimpse a phantom parent, friend,
Wearing his smile, and "Not the end!"
Outbreathing softly: that were blest enlightenment;[64]

in biblical quotations; and in numerous other references to tenets and practices in the Christian religion, we find that Hardy could not escape from the fact of the satisfying and comforting appeal that such made to man's emotional nature. In deference to this he even questioned the wisdom of disturbing people's faith and peace of mind and heart by presenting the truth as revealed by science:

Shall we conceal the Case, or tell it--
We who believe the evidence?
Here and there the watch-towers knell it

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[61]"The Impercipient," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 59.

[62]"An Afternoon Service at Mellstock," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 403.

[63]"An Apostrophe to an Old Psalm Tune," ibid., p. 404.

[64]"A Sign-Seeker," Wessex Poems, p. 43.

With a sullen significance,
Heard of the few who hearken intently and carry an eagerly upstrained sense.

Hearts that are happiest hold not by it;
Better we let, then, the old view reign:
Since there is peace in that, why decry it?
Since there is comfort, why disdain?
Note not the pigment so long as the painting determines humanity's joy and pain.[65]

To this "nostalgia for a lost or impossible faith" may be ascribed the impulsion in Hardy to seek a balance between reason and emotion; a reconciliation between science and religion. He esteemed so highly some of the values and virtues embodied in religion, especially the idea of the brotherhood of man or the "Golden Rule idea" (which he termed altruism) that he was loth to accept any scheme of the universe which did not include these. Hardy's shrewd intellect could penetrate to the profoundest depths to which science could take him and through cold reason resolve natural law to a satisfactory intellectual acceptance. But besides a mind which demanded an intellectual resolution Hardy had a heart which demanded consideration of emotional values and a soul which demanded consideration of moral values. He could discover no heart and soul in the Prime Cause or Unconscious Will which science offered. Physical science, with its theory of organic evolution through natural selection located the cell from which man germinated. It related man's

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[65]"The Problem," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 109.

physical being to that cell, but it left it to the province of philosophers and theologians to explore the potentialities of that cell for a possible source of man's emotional, mental and spiritual being. This is what most interested Hardy.

As heretofore mentioned, Hardy senses kinship in all creation. Wherever he turns he is confronted with evidence of the processes of natural laws, indicating that the same form of intelligence or Will operates throughout the universe in things animate and inanimate, differing only in degree or form of expression. In vividly poetic terms he interprets natural tendencies, such as those of attraction and repellence in field and forest growths, so as to reveal them identical with sentiency or intelligence which directs similar processes of development or decay in higher forms of creation. This is illustrated in such poems such as "The Ivy-Wife":

I longed to love a full-boughed beech
    And be as high as he:
I stretched an arm within his reach,
    And signalled unity.
But with his drip he forced a breach,
    And tried to poison me.

I gave the grasp of partnership
    To one of other race--
A plane: he barked him strip by strip
    From upper bough to base;
And me therewith; for gone my grip,
    My arms could not enlace.

In new affection next I strove
    To coll an ash I saw,
And he in trust received my love;
    Till with my soft green claw
I cramped and bound him as I wove . . .
    Such was my love: ha-ha!

By this I gained his strength and height
Without his rivalry.
But in my triumph I lost sight
Of afterhaps. Soon he,
Being bark-bound, flagged, snapped, fell outright,
And in his fall felled me![66]

We find this idea again in "In a Wood."[67] Man's struggle and that of all creation is toward harmonious adjustment to these laws--toward perfection in form, substance or being, discoverable in such as the flawless gem, the perfect flower, the warbling songster, or the saintly soul. Physical forms of creation work toward perfection or harmonious adjustment through the long, slow processes of physical law. The religionist seeks it through spiritual processes, such as faith in God and charity toward all and humble acceptance of "Thy will be done." The scientist seeks it through cosmic processess--in lengthened vision of time and space and of the identity of matter-energy--in the at-one-ment of all creation. All of these processes, says Hardy, are eternal--"since in a sane purview All things are shaped to be Eternally."[68] They are determined, retarded, even blocked by chance conjunctions of time, place, or circumstances. Conflict thus ensues, and out of conflict comes the gnarled tree, the contorted body, the distorted mind, the aborted soul--cosmic catastrophes.

In some of his poems Hardy takes cognizance of the

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[66]"The Ivy-Wife," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 50.

[67]"In a Wood," ibid., p. 56.

[68]"The Absolute Explains," Human Shows, 1925, p. 720.

identity or unification of the physical world through the scientific law of conservation, which states that nothing in matter is lost or destroyed. It may change form, as wood, when burned changes into smoke, ashes, and heat-energy, but every atom of matter-energy is conserved, and through transmutation appears again in new combinations and new forms. In his poem "Transformations" he notes this unity through physical processes:

> Portion of this yew
> Is a man my grandsire knew,
> Bosomed here at its foot:
> This branch may be his wife,
> A ruddy human life
> Now turned to a green shoot.[69]

In his poem on "Shelley's Skylark," he bids the fairies find "that tiny pinch of priceless dust," and tells us:

> Maybe it rests in the loam I view,
> Maybe it throbs in a myrtle's green,
> Maybe it sleeps in the coming hue
> Of a grape on the slopes of yon inland scene.[70]

In "Drummer Hodge,"[71] and "Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard,"[72] we find the same idea, and in "The Last Chrysanthemum" he recognizes this belated blossom as "but one mask of many worn by the Great Face behind."[73]

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[69]"Transformation," Moments of Vision, p. 443.

[70]"Shelley's Skylark," Poems of the Past and the Present, p. 92.

[71]"Drummer Hodge," ibid., p. 83.

[72]"Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard," Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922, p. 590.

[73]"The Last Chrysanthemum," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 136.

Again he discovers unity or kinship of the universe in the wisdom or instinct of birds and insects, which is akin to, yet differing from, the wisdom of man. The caroling of the darkling thrush, when "So little cause for carolings....Was written on terrestrial things," made the poet

> ...think there trembled through
> His happy good-night air
> Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
> And I was unaware.[74]

He expresses most feelingly his recognition of kinship with Deity in the zestful singing of the little bird blinded by the red-hot needle, and finds in this bird the embodiment of charity or altruism:

> So zestfully canst thou sing?
> And all this indignity,
> With God's consent, on thee!
> Blinded ere yet a-wing
> By the red-hot needle thou,
> I stand and wonder how
> So zestfully thou canst sing!
>
> Resenting not such wrong,
> Thy grievous pain forgot,
> Eternal dark thy lot,
> Groping thy whole life long,
> After that stab of fire;
> Enjailed in pitiless wire;
> Resenting not such wrong!
>
> Who hath charity? This bird.
> Who suffereth long and is kind,
> Is not provoked, though blind
> And alive ensepulchred?
> Who hopeth, endureth all things?
> Who thinketh no evil, but sings?
> Who is divine? This bird.[75]

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[74]"The Darkling Thrush," ibid., p. 137.

[75]"The Blinded Bird," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 418.

Again Hardy expresses this idea in lines from "An August Midnight":

. . . . . .

A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;
. . . . . .
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands. . .

. . . . . .

"God's humblest, they!" I muse. Yet why?
They know Earth-secrets that know not I.[76]

Not only in physical processes or transmutations and in the different degrees of tendency, sentience, or intelligence in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms does Hardy find evidence of the unity of the universe, but in personality projection, in memory, in "tripping tunes," in poetic flights, in all cosmic stimuli he senses unifying or integrating influences which make akin all creation. He speaks of the skylark being

". . . made immortal through times to be
. . . . . .
For it inspired a bard to win
Ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme.[77]

Then again as he stood on the Palatine in Rome, the sound of a Strauss waltz "blended pulsing life with lives long done."[78] In "The Vatican: Sals Delle Muse," we find beautifully poetized the "solidarity of all the arts."[79] In

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[76]"An August Midnight," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 134.

[77]"Shelley's Skylark," ibid., p. 92.

[78]"Rome: On the Palatine," ibid., p. 93.

[79]Later Years, p. 77.

this poem the poet tells the Muse he fears he is fickle because one day his soul clasps Form; the next he loves Story, Dance or Hymn. The Muse tells him:

> "....These are but phases of one;
>
> "And that one is I; and I am projected from thee,
> One that out of thy brain and heart thou causest to be--
> Extern to thee nothing...."[80]

It is through personality projection, so Hardy theorizes, that we and our loved ones attain immortality. "A shade but in its mindful ones has immortality" we are told in such poems as "Her Immortality"[81] and "His Immortality."[82] We, in other words, through physical and spiritual processes of cosmic law become the composite of a number of entities or personalities who in ages past have converged toward our time and become blended in our natures. This process of Chance or Fate Hardy described in his poem "Before Knowledge":

> "We move, while years as yet divide,
> On closing lines which--though it be
> You know me not nor I know you--
> Will intersect and join some day!"[83]

Nothing, Hardy tells us, has "passed out of continuity":

> . . . . . .
>
> Young, old
> Passioned, cold,

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[80]"The Vatican: Sala Delle Muse," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 94.

[81]"Her Immortality," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 48.

[82]"His Immortality," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 130.

[83]"Before Knowledge," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 418.

All the loved-lost thus
Are beings continuous,
In dateless dure abiding.[84]

Thus Hardy in his poems gives evidence of his belief that the great cosmic Force, or It, permeates and vitalizes and unifies all creation.

As a result of the evidence of intelligence in all the processes of natural law, physical and spiritual, as discoverable in tendency, sentiency, and instinct in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, and in the further development of consciousness and reason in man, Hardy conceives the idea and hope "of the Unconscious force as gradually becoming conscious: i.e. that consciousness is creeping further and further back towards the origin of force..."[85] He claims to be the originator of this idea as first published in The Dynasts. It is also embodied in his poems. In "The Blow," for instance, he speaks of

...the Immanent Doer's That doth not know

Which in some age unguessed of us
May lift Its blinding incubus,
And see, and own:
"It grieves me I did thus and thus!"[86]

Quite clearly we get this idea in his poem "Fragment":

"Since he made us humble pioneers
Of himself in consciousness of Life's tears,
It needs no mighty prophecy
To tell that what he could mindlessly show
His creatures, he himself will know.

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[84]"So, Time!", Human Shows, 1925, p. 723.

[85]Later Years, p. 270.

[86]"The Blow," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 449.

"By some still close-cowled mystery
We have reached feeling faster than he,
But he will overtake us anon,
If the world goes on."[87]

This is definitely a melioristic trend in Hardy's thinking, for with consciousness in the Prime Cause he hopes that amendment of man's misery will follow: "Yea, on, near the end," he says in one poem, "Its doings may mend."[88] And in "To an Unknown God" he says:

Perhaps Thy ancient rote-restricted ways
Thy ripening rule transcends;
That listless effort tends
To grow percipient with advance of days,
And with percipience mends.[89]

There is, however, much meliorism to be found in Hardy's poetry. Whereas, for instance in his notes he says: "The days of Creeds are as dead and done with as the days of Pterodactyls,"[90] he follows up this idea in his poem, "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds," where their spectes rise up and cry optimistically:

"Out of us cometh an heir, that shall disclose
New promise!" cried they. "And the caustic cup

We ignorantly upheld to men, be filled
With draughts more pure than those we ever distilled,
That shall make tolerable to sentient seers

87"The Fragment," ibid., p. 482.

88"Xenophanes, the Monist of Colophon," Human Shows, 1925, p. 692.

89"To an Unknown God," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 171.

90Later Years, p. 121.

The melancholy marching of the years."[91]

In "There Seemed a Strangeness" the poet's words have the ring of prophecy or revelation as he proclaims:

"Men have not heard, men have not seen
Since the beginning of the world
What earth and heaven mean;
But now their curtains shall be furled,

"And they shall see what is, ere long,
Not through a glass, but face to face;
And Right shall disestablish Wrong:
The Great Adjustment is taking place."[92]

"Whence comes Solace?"--he asks in "On a Fine Morning" and answers:

.....--Not from seeing
What is doing, suffering, being,
Not from noting Life's conditions,
Nor from heeding Time's monitions;
But in cleaving to the Dream,
And in gazing at the gleam
Whereby gray things golden seem.

Thus do I this heyday, holding
Shadows but as lights unfolding,
As no specious show this moment
With its iris-hued embowment;
But as nothing other than
Part of a benignant plan;
Proof that earth was made for man.[93]

We find a buoyant and lyrical outburst of optimism in his "Song of Hope":

O sweet To-morrow!--
After to-day
There will away

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[91]"The Graveyard of Dead Creeds," Human Shows, 1925, p. 689.

[92]"There Seemed a Strangeness," ibid.

[93]"On a Fine Morning," Poems of the Past and the Present, 1901, p. 118.

This sense of sorrow.
Then let us borrow
Hope, for a gleaming
Soon will be streaming,
Dimmed by no gray--
No gray!

. . . . . .

Doff the black token,
Don the red shoon,
Right and retune
Viol-strings broken:
Null the words spoken
In speeches of rueing,
The night cloud is hueing,
To-morrow shines soon--
Shines soon![94]

In "God's Funeral" he tells us:

Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
The insistent question for each animate mind,
And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,

Whereof, to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
"See you upon the horizon that small light--
Swelling somewhat?"....[95]

As in his novels Hardy used his rustics, so in his poems he used ghosts or shades of the departed, like the Greek chorus, by whom he interprets his ideas to us. In one of his earliest poems, "Friends Beyond," Hardy voices the Christian's belief in after life. He has a "group of local hearts" who have passed on whisper to him:

"We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane
to antidote,
Unsuccesses to success,

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[94]"Song of Hope," ibid., p. 120.

[95]"God's Funeral," Satires of Circumstance, 1914, p. 309.

Many thought-worn eves and morrows to a morrow free
of thought....
...death gave all that we possess."[96]

In his later period of "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings" these shades tell us that they live only as long as they are remembered.[97] In one of his latest utterances, however, he is again definitely melioristic, though in a more scientific vein, in the following verses:

"O No," said It; "her lifedoings
Time's touch hath not destroyed:
They lie their length, with the throbbing things
Akin them, down the Void,
Live, unalloyed.

. . . . . .

"Here you see her who, by these laws
You learn of, still shines on,
As pleasing-pure as erst she was,
Though you think she lies yon,
Graved, glow all gone.

. . . . . .

"And hence, of her you asked about
At your first speaking: she
Hath, I assure you, not passed out
Of continuity,
But is in me....[98]

Hardy's meliorism took further form in his hope of an alliance between religion and complete rationality by means of the interfusing effect of poetry.[99] "Religion," however,

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[96]"Friends Beyond," Wessex Poems, 1898, p. 52.

[97]"Her Immortality," ibid., p. 48.

[98]"The Absolute Explains," Human Shows, 1925, p. 721.

[99]"Preface," Late Lyrics and Earlier, 1922, p. 531.

he would have us know,

> is to be used...in its modern sense entirely as being expressive of nobler feelings toward humanity and emotional goodness and greatness, the old meaning of the word--ceremony, or ritual--having perished or nearly.[100]

His meliorism reached its peak in a hope he expressed that the Will would become not only conscious, but ultimately sympathetic,[101] resulting in universal altruism or brotherhood as described in "A Plaint to Man":

> ...The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
> That had best been faced in earlier years;
>
> The fact of life with dependence placed
> On the human heart's resource alone,
> In brotherhood bonded close and graced
>
> With loving-kindness fully blown,
> And visioned help unsought, unknown.[102]

In one of his notes he further explains:

> Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever 'Love your neighbor as yourself' may be called, will ultimately be brought about, I think, by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves as if we and they were a part of one body.[103]

Upon this hope that consciousness, and sympathy or altruism, would permeate the universe and bring relief "from life's roar and reek"[104] hinges Hardy's life effort and philosophy.

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[100] Later Years, 1930, p. 121.

[101] Ibid., p. 125.

[102] "A Plaint to Man," Satires of Circumstance, 1914, p. 306.

[103] Early Life, 1930, p. 294.

[104] "He Revisits His First School," Moments of Vision, 1917, p. 481.

He was one of the few of his day to see in Darwin's theory of evolution a moral force. In one of his letters he says:

> The discovery of the law of evolution which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively.[105]

In another he says:

> Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species is ethical; that it logically involved a readjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as a necessity of rightness the application of what has been called "The Golden Rule" beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom. Possibly Darwin, himself, did not wholly perceive it, though he alluded to it. While man was deemed to be a creation apart from all other creations, a secondary or tertiary morality was considered good enough towards the "inferior" races; but no person who reasons nowadays can escape the trying conclusion that this is not maintainable.[106]

In the face of Hardy's searching all creation for scientific basis on which to ground his hope that the world is growing better, there is significance in the following statement about the Darwinian theory:

> The doctrines of Darwin require readjusting largely; for instance, the survival of the fittest in the struggle for life. There is an altruism and coalescence between cells as well as antagonism. Certain cells destroy certain cells; but others assist and combine.[107]

Thus Hardy seems to apprehend the germ of fact which was necessary to satisfy his "impulse for certitude"; the germ of

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[105] *Later Years*, 1930, p. 138.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

fact upon which he postulates his theory that the Unconscious Will will in time become Conscious; the germ of fact, which discovers to him the source of that beneficence or altruism upon which he bases his belief that the world is growing better.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Many readers and critics dismiss Thomas Hardy as a pessimist. Hardy not only denies that he is a pessimist, but asserts that he is an evolutionary meliorist, a term denoting the belief that the world is growing better through a gradual process of evolution. The theory of organic evolution as advanced by Darwin and published in 1859, as Origin of Species, greatly disturbed the thinking in Hardy's day. The clash between science and religion became crucially controversial. Evidence has been submitted and poems quoted in this paper to show that Hardy accepted Darwin's theory of evolution, yet put forth a definite and sincere effort to reconcile his scientific viewpoint with principles derived in his early training and association from the Christian religion.

While Hardy insisted that his philosophy was only "tentative," evidence is submitted in cited and quoted poems to show that his thinking followed a definite trend--that of finding an answer to the question "Whence and why comes pain?" An answer to this question, he evidently believed would lead to amelioration, if not elimination, of suffering throughout the universe.

In this effort to discover the cause and possible cure of pain we follow him through various phases of thought as he weighs the merit of many "impressions of his age," such

as, for instance: fatalism and determinism; man a victim of indifferent Nature; Chance or a malignant Fate; man and his creator not two separate entities; the personal God, which the Christians believe in and which science attempts to destroy, a man-created God; the source of Being as an impersonal Force, called by some philosophers the Unconscious Will; man, a conscious creature developed beyond his Unconscious source.

Thus far Hardy found in the teachings of science a satisfactory intellectual resolution of these issues. Because of his early training and association, however, he never ceased to feel a "nostalgia" for human values embodied in the God which science destroyed for him, values, especially, implicit in the idea of the brotherhood of man which Hardy calls "altruism." Physical science was interested only in physical values. Hardy was interested in moral and spiritual values. By analogy with other facts in nature--for instance, the kinship of the physical universe as proved by science; the kinship in the processes of natural laws as shown by altruistic and antagonistic "tendencies" in the lower forms of creation, which he interprets as identical with instinct, intelligence or reason discoverable in higher forms of creation--he thus found all creation not only akin, but sentient and operating under one law. Hence he conceived the idea that the Unconscious Will will in time become Conscious.

Poems are cited or quoted and other evidence submitted

to show that Hardy gave expression to all these ideas and much meliorism besides. He voices in his poems, also, the hope that an alliance will come between religion, in its modern sense, and rationality. The peak of his meliorism is reached, however, in a hope expressed in his poems that the Unconscious Will which permeates all creation will become not only Conscious, but will "with percipience mend," and become sympathetic or altruistic.

This study of Hardy's lyrical poems, then, seems to show a progressively melioristic development in his "tentative" philosophy, which justifies his claim that he is an evolutionary meliorist.

Although The Dynasts furnishes further evidence of Hardy's meliorism, I have felt justified in excluding it because all of the ideas embodied in The Dynasts are developed in the lyrical poems. Further more, these lyrics offer a better chance to study Hardy's thinking through a longer period of time.

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